

Paul and Alice Cyr  
National Park Service, Alaska Regional Office  
Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park Oral History Project  
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Karen Brewster: My name is Karen Brewster and today is May 22, 2010 here is Skagway, Alaska with Paul and Alice Cyr who have come down to see us from Taggish. And Stacey Baldrige is on the video camera and this is for the Skagway Oral History Project. So I'm going to start with asking you to tell about each of yourselves and your history and how you got here, where you were born and how you ended up in Skagway. So we'll start with you Paul.

Paul Cyr: I was born August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1923 in Whitehorse, the Yukon at the general hospital but it's demolished now and there is another new one up now. What else?

Karen Brewster: About your parents

Paul Cyr: Oh well ah, there were seven of us kids and Mom and Dad and went to school, helped my Dad weekends when I wasn't going to school. And we had a lot of tough luck in the family, a couple broken arms and a broken leg so they took us out of the school, had to put grub on the table selling wood and water and that was something my Dad done and he had fallen on a saw and had sawn his arm pretty bad but anyway, we just had to have all the help we could to feed everybody in the family.

Alice Cyr: And his Dad had come into the country over the Chilkoot Trail in '98 and I was able to find that in the Mouny records hand written

Karen Brewster: So he came over looking for gold?

Paul Cyr: I think that was his intention, yah he came with his brother, they never did get out of Whitehorse, they never did get to Dawson I don't think. His brother ah, yah, it doesn't matter how old they are I remember they were going to make an airport in Whitehorse there was no airport and the brother gave them a bid on it, of course my Dad had the horses and he had to pull the stumps out and smooth they didn't have all fancy equipment back then. He would have done alright with that I guess.

Alice Cyr: That would have been about 1920

Karen Brewster: 1920?

Alice Cyr: Yah

Karen Brewster: And Alice what about you?

Alice Cyr: Well I was born in Washington State and I came the same year that Paul did, which was 1959. And my first husband was with Western Electric and Alaskan Communication System which then the

Department of the Army was hiring civilians to fill positions and so we came to Skagway in October of '59. And I never thought I had seen anything so bloody awful or so charming as Skagway, you know coming in from a city into Skagway.

Karen Brewster: and what is your family background?

Alice Cyr: Um, my father we lived on a farm in eastern Washington. My Parents came from the Midwest.

Karen Brewster: Un-huh, So Paul you were born in Whitehorse

Paul Cyr: Yes

Karen Brewster: But you didn't come down to Skagway until 1959?

Alice Cyr: Yes January of '59

Karen Brewster: So what were ...

Paul Cyr: I lived many places before I came down here.

Karen Brewster: un-huh

Paul Cyr: I worked for the Company and I had worked for Pan America and I worked several outfits anyway I was still working weekends helping my Dad and all the water had to be hauled in buckets, we can't do, four gallon buckets and then Dad had a set of horses and he decided to buy a caterpillar it would be more mobile for hauling the wood. And my brother knew about that and of course I was little bit small and I couldn't reach the pedals. He fixed that he made some pedals and wired them on so I could do it. I knew how to do it, I had it here (pointed to head) so I had to haul the wood.

Alice Cyr: So focus on Skagway, how did you come to Skagway?

Paul Cyr: Oh let's see, in between there I had gone to California with my first wife and then we came up here and we split the sheets. And then I went to Anchorage [] they sent me out to the Aleutians and I got a job right away, it was working a crane. I was unloading barges, the war was still going on, no I shouldn't say still going on, but they were remodeling these things. I got a job a while and I came back into town and my Mother was still living then and I went into the store to get some groceries or something and the store was right here, Do you know Whitehorse very good?

Karen Brewster: No

Paul Cyr: Well it doesn't matter there was a big store and I had gone in and I had a '56 Buick I'd gone in the store and come out and I see these lights flashing on this car and I heard somebody honk the horn. I went over there to see, and they said hey. They knew who I was and I knew who they were but they were in that car and they said get in the car and I got in and we want you to come back to work with us and I told them I need to go back to Anchorage and get a few clothes and stuff and they said as soon as you put your hand on that handle of that door of the Depot you're on the payroll. And I said, god, I got

in that car and I went as fast as I could to Anchorage and gathered up my stuff and come back and on the payroll.

Karen Brewster: And that was working for White Pass?

Paul Cyr: Yes, I was on the payroll. And they said they'd bring the car on the train [] and then they said well where are we going to put me? Let's put you in the hotel. And just like that I went to the hotel and then

Karen Brewster: So what job did you get

Paul Cyr: Aye?

Karen Brewster: So what job did you get when you first started

Paul Cyr: They just had a job. They knew I could run the equipment and so they were going to put me in the car shop and break me in as a car shop and break me in changing wheels and [] just get the knowledge of it. And I done that. And then all of a sudden they had a train wreck, not a train wreck but a derailment, and so all of a sudden they said you better tag along with him. I shouldn't talk people, I hate to, but he was quite a "sauce" drinker and he just could not (motioned someone tipsy and drinking) and no one wanted to work around him because they were afraid he was going to get hurt, somebody was going to get hurt and the big job was going up to Carcross. And so I tagged along with him and pretty soon I was sitting on the seat up there I was the only one, he would pass out in the hotel room and that was my start moving up the ladder. Then all of a sudden I didn't have any of the jobs in the shop I was always out on the road. Every time there was a derailment or some gravel or something to work something big, down load down here [] when the company got the contract for hauling the ore from the [] to the train we had to change all that track down to Whitehorse and we had to clear it off and level it and I did that. And the boss man came out the door with an ice cream cone, he had a little cooler and he came out with an ice cream cone for the four of us, there was four of us and something to drink every afternoon and my god can't you guys go any faster? They wanted to get this cleared off and burned off so we can get the track in and that was a good start with the big boss, and he (snapped fingers) reaction when we had him (ha ha ) and then what else did we do? I can't remember? What else did I done next?

Alice Cyr: The reason they knew him and knew he could run equipment was because he had worked for White Pass on the side [] at one time as soon as the war was over and the road was opened for civilian use then it was open for trucks, buses and tanker trucks to deliver fuel up and down the highway. So he drove truck from Whitehorse to Dawson Creek and bus from Whitehorse to Beaver Creek. And the company put in they were little more than tar paper shacks but they were little hotels along the way so the drivers and others could sleep along the way.

Karen Brewster: And you met him here?

Alice Cyr: No I met him here, in Skagway. But that is why they knew him when they saw him on the street in Skagway and knew that he could run equipment.

Karen Brewster: Oh, okay we're going to take a little pause for a second.

Paul Cyr: Right

Karen Brewster: So you ran equipment for the White Pass. What kind of things did you do?

Paul Cyr: Mostly it was derailments, every time there was a derailment (pop) I had to go. If I was in Whitehorse they would put me on a plane and get me there as quick as they could. And there were a couple kinds of equipment I could run.

Karen Brewster: What kind of equipment, how did you take care of the train?

Paul Cyr: The crane that goes on wheels or on tracks and you can boom and you can move it around and you can lift many, many tons. So oh, god it was a different job every day, it was one person came back and they fly me and they came and got me one day in the shop, one of the bosses, Bob Bissell, he says can you be ready in five minutes we're got to get you to Whitehorse and we have a plane that just got here from Anchorage and it had the team of big shots and they had a big union meeting or something and it's on its way back to Whitehorse and we can fly it back to Whitehorse and you can keep going. It was winter time all you could see was snow and stuff. And the pilot was unfamiliar with the mountains and stuff and he was just looking for those rails and we'd get close to Whitehorse and no way we lost track and well we made a turn and he said we're going to go to Attlan. Have you ever been to Attlan? I says, yah. So we flew in and we couldn't get into Attlan, the weather and those big flakes was whiteout and god and we went that and we went over to Tesslin and we camped at we went to Tesslin. And there were several other planes there too, what for I don't know, people that I knew and they were camping at the campground. And the campground, the government had a place you could sleep and so we were there for a couple days and then we were having a hard time getting... we plugged them all in with electricity, all the airplane motors and we blew the fuses and then next morning you couldn't, on the propeller you couldn't move nothing, there were four of us planes all twin engines and then I had to get them all going. And it was a while before I got the Whitehorse plane going. They wanted me in Whitehorse day before yesterday but then I phoned when I got back to Whitehorse I phoned the office and they just wanted to know where the devil I you've been and I told them where the devil I'd been and how many miles I had made around explained to them, and Oh that's where you were. And that was a big storm right there.

Karen Brewster: When you ran equipment did you help keep the snow off the tracks?

Paul Cyr: Beg your pardon

Karen Brewster: Did you keep the snow off the railroad tracks?

Paul Cyr: Oh I've done that after, no I wasn't doing that then, I was doing cat work but not on the track they wanted to see if I was safe on the track, wreck on the rail or break a rail and that messes up the whole train so they knew they better try him out first so. Now ah, a few years had gone by and they sent me up to clear out some [] one at Glacier, White Pass, well every section place and the guys were switching around much snow and every day those switches, every day a train was going to Whitehorse

and freight going to (showed arms crossed) [] clean and then there was no place to throw it. They couldn't throw it up as high as here so they just said the cat, and I loaded it on the cat and just like a car to me. One of the bosses drove by and he said can we mash that down. And it didn't take very long and I mashed it down and got up to the next place well there was a bridge and they wouldn't [] tracks with a cat because the tracks hung over a little bit. So I had to load it on and I'd go to the next place and cleared that yard, two or three whatever switches they had. And they had to be cleared off because those guys used them every day and those guys couldn't shovel the snow it was too high

Karen Brewster: Wow there is that much snow?

Alice Cyr: See the road

Paul Cyr: Oh yah, snow bad

Alice Cyr: Maybe twelve feet at the summit and the rotary snowplow only plows

Paul Cyr: Straight edge

Alice Cyr: only plows like a straight arrow tunnel through that. And so when you come to tunnel [] where the trainmen need to walk down alongside the train then that is cat work to push the snow back.

Karen Brewster: To make it wider

Alice Cyr: Right to make it wider, so at the sections where the like at the Glacier and Whitehorse he'd be there with the cat to push the snow so they had access to the whole yard not just a pathway as wide as the rotary snowplow.

Karen Brewster: And this was before there was the Klondike Highway

Paul Cyr: Yah

Alice Cyr: Oh yah, this was

Paul Cyr: and on this caterpillar there was no cab like in, open wide open, there was no windshield, no door nothing just it had a roof that's all but it was wide open snow blowing in

Karen Brewster: That must have been cold work.

Paul Cyr: [] I just seemed like difference jobs is all. And I would clean those all out and I have to tell you, not right then but they had had a few stucks so I had to take it up or drive it up on the train it was stuck so it ended up that they took a rotary out one morning out of here to clear the track until you get to White Pass [] and Whitehorse. And he got stuck so they sent the other rotary up and this requires ten men to run, ten men to run, there's firemen and god all doesn't matter. And so I went up and the two of them were stuck and nobody, they couldn't move anyway. And here I'm down at Glacier and that's about mile 15

Alice Cyr: Yah, 14 []

Paul Cyr: And yah, we're stuck. Can you come on up and get the other train down from Whitehorse? They had to move these rotaries and so I went up I didn't know I was going to be embraced by one of the Superintendent he was on the rotary. We're so glad to see you. What are we going to do, now? And I said I haven't eaten breakfast yet so I had breakfast and god it didn't take me very long and got behind the cat and gave it a few pushes [] it required a lot of water, the steam engine is required water to run to make the wheels go and make the wheels go this way (motions bike pedals action)and so I got them cleared enough to get down to the water tank and get up and get the other one out and the other one was about a mile further out and he couldn't go either way north or south so I got him loose. So I got my job done for the day.

Karen Brewster: What did [] cats were more modern equipment

Paul Cyr: I do not know

Alice Cyr: I can't imagine, they only had two rotaries

Paul Cyr: Maybe the snow wasn't as bad then, on man It was bad then, but it was bad. But they had to have those trains running because they were hauling their own freight in and they had their own boat from Vancouver to here and then they had the railroads so they hauled all this stuff into the Yukon and so that train track had to be going all the time. [] this much snow over twenty feet of snow but somehow they done it but it never got to twenty feet but when those rotaries got stuck there were banks as high as this wall. It was just a cut you know.

Karen Brewster: What about avalanches, was that a problem?

Paul Cyr: Oh many, many yes

Alice Cyr: Many a time

Paul Cyr: Clean them up and then (pop) all filled right back in and so

Karen Brewster: Could the rotaries get through an avalanche?

Paul Cyr: No not all of them, not if it wasn't too deep [] I think that I have any pictures but I seen guys get up on top and they had whistle, it was either forward or back, they didn't have radios, it was whistle so you could tell back up and hit her again and so they'd ram into it again and they would stop and whistle and they'd back up again and stop until they could get it moving. And then I'd come with my cat and do what ten guys couldn't do in hours.

Alice Cyr: There's a lot of stuff besides snow in avalanche pieces of ice, I mean pieces of ice are as big as a bathroom I mean that kind of ice and rocks so if the rotary smacks into that or runs up on that then they're derailed and they're stuck in a slide zone. So ...

Paul Cyr: And slides come down the road or I mean the slides come down the mountain it doesn't all [] you scoop up a rock here and a rock here and trees and oh god

Karen Brewster: I would think that debris would break the rotary.

Paul Cyr: Oh yah

Alice Cyr: Break the blade it certainly could

Paul Cyr: The big wheel on the front many times something breaks on that, (pop) got to get it back to Skagway to the machine shop or put another one on.

Karen Brewster: So if it got stuck would the train ever back all the way down?

Paul Cyr: yes sometimes they had to you know the wheel didn't have to work [] if it is all broken

Karen Brewster: They would back all the way down?

Paul Cyr: Oh yes

Alice Cyr: If the back way was clean, behind them but you ask about how they got the rotary unstuck before there were cats. The rotary gets stuck because it can't back up far enough to get far enough back to go full steam and to bite, to bite into the snow so when the drifts or it is snowing really hard [] that's when they get stuck and they would have to hand shovel it and they would have to get men to hand shovel enough so the rotary could back up to push forward because when they reach a point where they can't do that and then it just gets worse and worse by the minute because of the snow was coming down and the wind is blowing.

Karen Brewster: un-huh

Paul Cyr: I think the one time (cough) excuse me, the rotary was up there and I was up there [] and I was just cleaning the yard well I just went up for the ride. I was on rotary riding and hell I could do this with the cat and hell I could do them out of a lot of work, ten guys I could do all that but the train men didn't want to see that cat moving up there.

Karen Brewster: I was going to ask if you were popular as a cat man with the train men because you were keeping the tracks clear for them.

Paul Cyr: Oh, no no

Alice Cyr: No, no

Paul Cyr: No they had a guarantee for the month for such and such a month from the fall to the winter until the spring. And in the spring a lot of slides come down and they need that rotary. But I could be one guy and I could do all that, clean that rotary I don't know if it is a hundred feet long or two hundred feet it doesn't take very long with the cat if you know what you're doing and you have a place to go, so ...

Alice Cyr: The Cat needed to have a flagman particularly on the hills to watch for slides coming and so they could put a Cat at Glacier with a flagman, [] or a cat at the Summit with a flagman and a cat at

Frazier with a flagman. So six men replaced, both rotaries and each rotary was a ten man crew, the rotary engine with its fireman and engineer, the pusher engine with its fireman and engineer, the conductor and brakeman and all that. One fellow told Paul that he told his kid to be aware of the boogie man and the boogie man was Paul Cyr. (ha ha) Because they thought they'd be out of work which didn't happen but

Karen Brewster: (ha ha) Well so the your Cat and you as the driver and your flagman, were you stationed

Paul Cyr: In the beginning I never had a flagman I just went

Karen Brewster: But did you live up at Glacier ? And at White Pass and for the season you just lived up there

Paul Cyr: Yeah

Karen Brewster: And at White Pass and for the season you just lived up there

Alice Cyr: And until snowmachines he would be gone for six weeks at a time [] before snowmachines came on the scene.

Paul Cyr: Mine I bought it in Whitehorse and it sent it down

Alice Cyr: Then he would get to come home because it was possible then for him to get back

Karen Brewster: by snowmachine

Alice Cyr: Right

Karen Brewster: So would you snowmachine down the tracks? There was

Paul Cyr: They brought it down on the train and then they brought it down to White Pass

Alice Cyr: No, would you snow machine on the tracks?

Karen Brewster: How would you on here

Paul Cyr: No just the tracks things

Karen Brewster: What trails did you use?

Paul Cyr: No I didn't use the snowmachine I used the cat from point A to point B I would use the snowmachine. I could climb up on top of the snow bank and park it and there it is, do my work

Alice Cyr: But to come home a motorcar would come up as far as the snow was so he would come down between the rails, the snowmachines are not that much wider than the rails

Karen Brewster: So you would ride the snowmachine down between the rails

Paul Cyr: Two people could

Alice Cyr: Well see

Karen Brewster: Between the rails

Paul Cyr: Yah

Alice Cyr: See

Paul Cyr: all smooth

Alice Cyr: It was full of snow so it was smooth

Paul Cyr: Easy to drive, always hard to climb up on the rails there,

Karen Brewster: Fun so what was that like living up at the stations for so long.

Paul Cyr: AH, they fed us good, that was a good, had a good room not everybody had a room at White Pass I had a room and at Glacier [] in with the guys. But now it is all burnt down but anyways both of them I helped burn the one at White Pass down after we had new quarters, trailers and they put them all together, water and showers and stuff they were fired up so the Assistant Superintendent after supper he said what are we going to do tonight. And I said probably play a cards for a while, no you're going back to work. We're going to go over and burn the old shack, just like that? He said what do we need? I said five gallon gas, five gallon oil so we went down there just him and I, no section guys the cat was not very far away I should put some snow on the track I took it from the lake because it's going to make a lot of water and the next morning the tracks would be all iced up and freeze, no travel on [] So where are we going to start at the bottom or the top. Hell let's start at the bottom, get a good fire going, winter time and it was snow blowing and we had that fire going. Never took any pictures of it, I would have liked to but it was nighttime but boy that stuff was paper flying and I was out there real early and cleared the snow off and the train came in and everything was fine. But we had [] he was just across the border it was just the border and they wanted me to tear the customs, the American Customs, right at the okay we were right at the border and in fact her brother was one of the agents and anyway they wanted to tear those down and they had just fallen. What the heck else.

Alice Cyr: One of the advantages that Paul had, and they probably realized it when they collared him in Whitehorse when he went to California in 1957 he had a green card

Paul Cyr: you know what that is, I can work either side

Alice Cyr: Yes a Canadian citizen with a US green card he could work the whole 110 mile line. So if there was a derailment anywhere along put the wrecking crane on the work train and he could do it anywhere.

Karen Brewster: Otherwise people either worked in Skagway to the border or Whitehorse

Alice Cyr: that's right

Paul Cyr: Yes they could run me back and forth and it suited me fine too so when I got there and bigger money here on the American side than on the Canadian side, but when I start I stayed on the high rate, so if they wanted me to do some work I still stayed on this rate here. Home was Skagway but I could go run across, that suited them fine. And then the pipeline, [] they had a four inch pipeline it took some slides and then the rocks it took the pipeline out and then you'd have to go and find out where it was and clean up around it, shoot it had to be repaired right away so...

Karen Brewster: And then Alice when you came here, you came with your first husband you said, what kind of work, did you work here in Skagway?

Alice Cyr: We had a family and I did a lot of volunteer work. But I never held really a job until I went to work for the park Service in '83 but it was a good place to live, it was a good place to raise kids but it was totally, totally different than it is now, totally different.

Karen Brewster: in what ways?

Alice Cyr: There was no pavement anywhere there was grass growing up through the sidewalks downtown. The grocery store was in an old Army Commissary building and so they called the grocery store the Commissary, with a floor furnace. And when we had two freighters and Alaskan Steam came once a month and the Canadian Freighter which was bringing Freight to Whitehorse every other Monday. And that is when you got meat or milk, or produce and which you bought as much as you could afford or store whichever came first. And then sometimes when the freighter would come in they would call people in town especially those with a big families that might have a freezer to come down at midnight and get roasts and things because the store didn't have enough room for everything [] either. And then they got a better store later and um, I remember being called could we come down and help unload the truck that had come off the ferry, the north wind was blowing, they couldn't leave it out and to had to get it all into the back of the store. And they would call people that might go down and help. And so we went down and helped sometimes a freight truck with the produce would come in and the cooling system went bezurk and everything was frozen and I remember the store lady calling me and saying come down and take whatever you want. I remember going down and getting boxes of cherries frozen solid, tomatoes and peppers and things, things that I could use that I [] had come in frozen solid then I made jam out of it. And then I gave the store lady jam back you know, thank you very much. You know there were lots, I mean it wasn't a city. Things came in on the ferry which was a huge improvement and they came in by freight so things would go wrong, or the milk would go sour and they didn't have a meat packed like they do now. The meat that you got was black as that filing cabinet and it was perfectly edible and it oxidized in the shipping or something and would be black and it tasted fine. And they got it processed and they called it Crawback and that meant that [] was red

Karen Brewster: The Alaskan Highway was built by this point

Alice Cyr: The Alaskan Highway was built by this point

Karen Brewster: But they still were bringing freight through Skagway.

Alice Cyr: There was no, Yes there was still a lot of freight that came through Skagway for Whitehorse. Cars, cars came in unloaded off of the freighter and loaded onto the railroad [] to drive on the highway.

Paul Cyr: Heaters in some of the cars on the railway and they could run them in the winter time even with the heaters on so got to Whitehorse it still not frozen, hopefully not.

Alice Cyr: Pretty tough trucking in the wintertime then.

Karen Brewster: Yes and so winter hauling freight by truck up the Alaskan Highway would have been a difficult thing.

Alice Cyr: See they can put it all

Paul Cyr: Yah, they owned that railway [] highway and they were trucking from Dawson Creek to Whitehorse and then up to the border. Yah, I done that for a couple years.

Alice Cyr: And in the '50s they launched a container ship just for containers but they were very small containers. And then in the '70s they launched bigger ships that carried the big containers that you see now that [] that size containers so they could put automobiles and everything in those. And those containers had heaters in them if needed or cooling equipment if needed. It made a big difference but a lot of those haven't changed.

Karen Brewster: When did you two meet and marry?

Alice Cyr: Right away and when we came

Paul Cyr: Yes see what year did we came here, '72?

Alice Cyr: '59

Paul Cyr: '59 excuse me, [] '59 and I come just about the same time they came up

Alice Cyr: We've been together since '61

Paul Cyr: They invited me for a couple meals. And boy she could cook. I was bachelor then so ah ...

Karen Brewster: How did you meet?

Alice Cyr: Somebody in town introduced us.

Karen Brewster: Somebody knew both of you

Alice Cyr: Exactly everybody in town knew one another. In '59 the base populations was probably 600 there were some, the ships that came up, the Prince George and the Princess Patricia were combination freight and passenger ships so in the summer time they would maybe have 60 or 70 tourists on so the Days of '98 Show started giving some kind of entertainment for the visitors and that was the only tourism that [] the Days of '98 Show, Kermsey's Jewelry store, Rictor's jewelry store Deadman's photo shop and that was about it. And then in the '70s Chuck West, the Chuck West of West tours, the Holland

America West Tours put a had two new ships built, they still had [] but they were strictly for tourism, one was the Glacier Queen []. And so then you had a little more happening. The first big ship was the um, the Italia and the first the original Island Princess. And that was where the first cruise ships as you know cruise ships today but they were smaller.

Karen Brewster: []

Alice Cyr: Probably in '74 somewhere in there. It was a big deal. And all the towns and the communities in the southeast were scrambling to figure out what they could do to make their town attractive to the tourist and Sitka was really looking to get the cruise ships to come to [] because we had the Days of '98 and we had the train, we had the train excursions and

Karen Brewster: Speaking of which I think I hear the train

Alice Cyr: and so Sitka started the Russian Dancers at that time to have a drawing card for Sitka.

Karen Brewster: Well I think we'll have to take a slight break for the train

Paul Cyr: Hauls all the people back and forth

Karen Brewster: Yes

(break and then resumes)

Paul Cyr: They stopped here well they had to give it power to get it over to the watershed

Karen Brewster: I don't know why they had to keep it running if they were just going to sit there. But anyway you were going to tell a story

Paul Cyr: What was I going to tell a story about, oh I was staying n Glacier that's where I was staying all of the week, sometimes I'd get to come in for the weekend but sometimes I was staying there [] this one section it had a big dog and I came in one afternoon about five o'clock and there was the dog asleep on my bed. I went over to the phone and I picked it up and I said I'm going to stop the train and get on it. And they said you're going to what? They wanted to know the reason. And I said there is a dog here and if I'm going to see a dog I'm not going to sleep with one. Well what's the trouble? I says if that dog isn't out of here by the time, I'll flag that train and I'll be on and oh they didn't want that to happen cause who's going to clean the track the next day. We'll stop the train and the dog will be on it. And oh I made some bad friends []. And if I come in here one more, No I'm not coming in here one more time I won't be here, I quit.

Alice Cyr: He obviously doesn't like dogs

Karen Brewster: Yes you obviously don't like dogs. Well how did you communicate from the section

Paul Cyr: Phone

Karen Brewster: Oh you had phones, okay

Paul Cyr: Not in the Cat or nothing pick it up and there were polls you could hook them up where ever the wires were if you were working with the telephone wires [] answering it away and pull, pulled back in and put it away so it wouldn't get damaged.

Alice Cyr: Didn't you have to put the blade in the Cat up and then climb out

Paul Cyr: Yah there's I've get some pictures of that

Alice Cyr: Stand on the blade to reach

Paul Cyr: and I'd go underneath the wire on the cat and climb up on the cab and hook up the phone here and god it happened lots of times like that.

Karen Brewster: We talked to the Selmers this morning and they said there was some story about you saving his brother's life or something

Paul Cyr: No ... You better believe it. If it wasn't for me he'd be nothing I know it. Okay I'll start at the beginning. I come down the mountain stopped the train and had a cat and the cab owner radio to radio he said you have to go down there's a slide down there. And so the train held up and I gone off the track and he went into Glacier and all of a sudden the whole mountain came down but in behind the train there was this section Foreman Lloyd Tagiack he was an Eskimo and he had two men, one of the Selmer boys and Dave Knapp, no, it was Knapp, it doesn't matter they were in behind in a motor car and [] down in that buried that whole motor car but two of them got out there were two doors on either side and they got out, the foreman and this Knapp and this Eskimo kid ran around the back and it slide more. And I was parked around [] and I could see the slide and I didn't know it buried the motor car so here is this kid come running my way. Well I started the cat up right away, shut it down cause [] I says so what's the matter, he says we're buried and we don't know where it is. It was about 80 feet long and 30 feet deep. And I'm going to dig in there with a thirty ton cat and I could mash that in one push so I had to be careful. And I phoned Whitehorse, or Skagway what are we going to do? Or what do you want me to do, wait till you send a crew up with poles to find where it's at? And I never nothing I just [] I says you have no idea, no idea cause they had jumped out and they had jumped in the shed and the slide was coming down, coming down and they got out. And here Wayne was sitting up in the front there and they all had on hard hats and there was a pole and that is what I thought it hit and tip it over off the tracks so I kept digging and they kept hollering and screaming [] digging and I was watching those guys and watching this end and got it and finally we found it and I found that motor car.

Karen Brewster: That was amazing that h

Alice Cyr: Amazing that he was still in it yah

Paul Cyr: god no way and

Alice Cyr: His hard hat came down

Paul Cyr: Yes and he had lots of hair and we got there and got it opened and yah, I had the cat right there and you think you can get to the cat right there? [] and I would crying too if I was found I was just so close to being dead. And he says you could have killed me there. And I said yah, I wasn't going to wait for them to tell me in Skagway. I took it on myself. And he got on and he cried all the way back to Glacier and there were some more slides that came down and I cleaned those all the way back to Glacier. Soon as I got to Glacier I left the Cat in the middle of the track and I opened the door and they knew then [] and I said you got some blankets and at the same time they had a doctor come over from Haines and his mom was a nurse here and another train, an ore train went up there to pick him up, pick him up in pieces or whatever which way he might be in. And god he was lucky. And to this day he, did you meet him? You met him?

Karen Brewster: No we met his Stan []

Paul Cyr: Well his brother he was a pretty big kid, to this day every time he sees me now he comes up and he hugs me like a little you know like one of my ...

Karen Brewster: I think we have another train.

Alice Cyr: Yes we do

(Break again)

Paul Cyr: And it stayed on the tracks

Alice Cyr: Just a little square [] pull a little trailer

Karen Brewster: [] that kind of stuff

Paul Cyr: It moved the guys back and forth wherever they were working []

Alice Cyr: Yah Casey

Karen Brewster: Yah Casey Car

Paul Cyr: I'll never forget we got them local on the train heading back to Whitehorse or Skagway, the mom, the nurse, and the doctor one of the big bosses Marvin Taylor was one of the bosses and he said what are you going to do? I'm going back dig the motor car out off the track, we don't know where it is so, Why don't you wait till morning? I said no I'll do it now, the temperature has gone down and I grabbed another guy and ate supper and went back up that night and dug the track out.

Alice Cyr: It is the only single track, they could not get a train out in the morning

Karen Brewster: yes

Paul Cyr: The next morning it would be all fouled up and I wouldn't have that all cleaned off and I had to go get that area clean from Glacier to White Pass because that was the best [] and of course the tracks

hung over a little bit and my mark to see where I was going in white out was the rails and I could drop my blade and take the top off and see the rail and I could see so I didn't ... tip over

(discussion about filming between Karen and Stacey)

Karen Brewster: Going and using your cat to dig the boy or the guy out of the avalanche you must have been very good with equipment. That is very delicate work.

Paul Cyr: It is so powerful I could move this building here, god

Karen Brewster: Well you must have been very good

Alice Cyr: Just tickle, tickle, tickle, tickle

Paul Cyr: Well I don't if I was but I had to be good and be careful. I mean I didn't want to kill him off and hit that motor car the wrong way and tip him over and it would be the end of him. And it would have been the end of me too. I think it would have affected me bad.

Alice Cyr: Yes it was the only time I've ever seen him genuinely upset and I don't think the enormity of didn't hit until he got back home. And he was rocking back and forth, sitting on the edge of his bed rocking back and forth and saying I could have killed him [] cause if he had been out of the motor car he would have run over him and killed but if he didn't get him out of there he was going to suffocate anyway. So it was a gamble, it was just a chance he took but don't think when he, I don't think when he started to go into the slide I don't think he thought I'm going to go in here and find the motor car [] if he was out of the motorcar it would have killed him and I don't think the reality of that hit until he got home.

Paul Cyr: Yes it was fortunate, it was lucky too I think more lots of luck, too.

Alice Cyr: Tell her about going off 14 Mile Bridge I love that story

Paul Cyr: Now this is a different guy, a section guy and he had snowmachined down from White Pass the morning [] Glacier and the cat was there and I got there ahead of him and I fired it up. And I was waiting for him, he was going to be my flagman for the day. So pulls in with his snowmachine and parks it and he hadn't been across the tracks

Alice Cyr: And keep in mind that the flagman are never, I mean never to ride in the cat

Paul Cyr: never to ride in the cat

Alice Cyr: across the bridge, but Paul always took them

Paul Cyr: you didn't where they were

Alice Cyr: Crossing the bridge in a howling wind, freezing snow, freezing to death and he had []

Paul Cyr: And they're walking, you're driving, you're looking ahead you're not looking back like this (behind ) which way are you going to go, off the track or look the way you're going and run over him. So anyway we took off towards Glacier and the snow was deep, deep, deep and pushing it off and as soon as it went off the tracks the blade would push it all (sound effects and hands in the air) [] and it made a complete flip and this thing weighs god I don't know how many tons it weighs

Alice Cyr: A wing on that, there is a blade and then they have a wing and then the blade and it was the wing that caught and flipped over and caught

Karen Brewster: So you flipped off the bridge?

Paul Cyr: Flipped right off and dropped about 75 feet, did a complete flip

Alice Cyr: Yah 360 degrees and \*\*\* []

Paul Cyr: [] kid and I didn't let anybody smoke. I didn't smoke and nobody was going to smoke sitting next to me. If he's riding with me he's going to eat his supper he's not going to eat his smoke. So gets his cigarette out and he was shaking like, he wasn't much younger than I was and I said, "Give me that god dang cigarette ." So I got a puff going and gave it back to him, here [] saw him a couple times after that and he said man I had to have that cigarette he said what are we going to do, what happened? We went off the bridge and we're going to go get on the snowmachines and get out of here. He had brought one and we'd go on that we'd double back, go up to White Pass and get another cat . Jesus he was still shaking and he was quite a bit younger than I was. He said I'm not driving it you'll have to, I'll drive it []. And I told them here what happened. I said we had a little accident we've got a cat down in the Canyon. Well the big boss well he hadn't heard from him well the cat was down in the canyon and we had to walk out of there and the snow was this deep and we had to crawl out of there. And we had to get the snowmachine going. He says is everything alright. I said yah we're fine. [] He says the cat it will keep down there it's sitting upright in about two days you couldn't even see it.

Alice Cyr: But the snow was so deep

Paul Cyr: (ha ha) and they were worried

Alice Cyr: But there was hardly anything wrong with the cat.

Paul Cyr: I went down there two or three weeks later, yah it was a couple weeks. I took another cat and I made a road down in the snow just [] I got it going and we towed it out and got it back to the shop. And there wasn't a thing wrong with it, it broke the aerial off that's the only thing.

Alice Cyr: And then it had wood jammed in the exhaust pipe. That was about it.

Paul Cyr: Yep, that was about it.

Alice Cyr: So I called the master mechanic when it was going to come out of the shop? And he told me and I said when it comes out of the shop you find some bicycle training wheels and weld them on the sides []

Karen Brewster: So how far did you have to walk back to get to your snowmachine

Paul Cyr: No, no right there at Glacier, not even a hundred feet.

Alice Cyr: Really close

Karen Brewster: You were saying before when we were off tape about the visibility and making sure that you didn't go off the track. How could you make sure that you were clearing the right places and you didn't go off?

Paul Cyr: You didn't know, you just ... you had to guess I guess []

Karen Brewster: No if you couldn't see, how did you make sure you didn't go off

Paul Cyr: Well I could guess. I know where we're at approximately the glacier I knew the track and how it would go in here (heart) and here (head) not say I could go blindfolded but if I could see just a little bit of rocks sticking out here or something I could (motions with hand forward)

Alice Cyr: It was so white out that, have you ever you been in a white out?

Karen Brewster: Yes

Alice Cyr: [] You can't tell which way is up and that is how it is. And that 's what happened.

Karen Brewster: Well and that's what I was wondering

Paul Cyr: I had a few times like that, no I shouldn't say a few times, but it seems like here (head) I'm 100 feet from the shed, the snow shed. And then one trainee he got stuck coming down one night [] and office here and you want to talk to Paul. He wanted me to take off right away. Well I lhad lights on the cat but and in the shed the shed was filled up both front and back. And he had got that and derailed right at the end. We had to get another cat from White Pass and clean out and tow it back three cars at a time [] we could pull this other with two cats and then I could finally get through the tunnel just ... now since then the snow conditions are different and they tore the sheds down they just rotted and so

Karen Brewster: And they don't run in the winter anymore either

Paul Cyr: No they don't

Alice Cyr: Not anymore

Karen Brewster: So how many years did you work for White Pass?

Paul Cyr:

Alice Cyr: From '59, from January of '59 to September of '88, just short of thirty years.

Karen Brewster: Wow, and all the time as a cat operator?

Paul Cyr: Not only cats but I just run everything

Alice Cyr: Cats, cranes, heavy duty

Paul Cyr: [] that's the most important thing. And on the cat they had a big boom thing Wench the cable it takes two guys to pull it. I could [] the chain but the hook it's like this thing, it would take two guys to lift it but I could hook it onto something I could pull it out it was a very important piece of machinery I guess you'd say

Alice Cyr: When they first brought him down they brought him down they put him in the car shop

Paul Cyr: god I hated that job

Alice Cyr: If the heavy duty man was in his cups and couldn't work then he went out or it was something big and they needed two pieces of equipment then he went out. It wasn't really, it was maybe a year until he was the heavy duty man and was out all the time.

Karen Brewster: [] He'd spend weeks up at the stations up there

Paul Cyr: Glacier we had lots of that, staying up there for a week

Karen Brewster: How was that for your family? Your family stayed in town, how did that work out?

Alice Cyr: When he first started that I worried a lot and I always figured they'd bring him home in a paper bag one day, just whatever they could find of him.

Paul Cyr: (ha ha)

Alice Cyr: But I realized how much he enjoyed his work

Paul Cyr: I enjoyed my work.

Alice Cyr: And he knew what he was doing and if he wasn't afraid then I shouldn't be afraid.

Paul Cyr: I've got to tell you one little story, John Clark he was a foreman at Glacier but that doesn't matter but he stayed here in Skagway and he had come back that evening with his crew. He had a three or four guys. And he stopped by the house and told Alice, Paul won't be home for supper tonight. He's staying at Glacier. I could have phoned her and gone through proper channels but []. Geez I got a great big supper on the table, it's going to be on the table very soon as soon as he comes in the door, Well we can see about that he was having ... I don't remember all that , (ha ha) but damn if he didn't go and eat my supper. And of course he ran into me the next day, Guess where I had supper last night? Hell I don't know no, no Alice invited me and I ate all your supper. Holy god, I laughed like the dickens about that, and we laughed about that for a long time

Alice Cyr: He was a bad one, he

Paul Cyr: You said I knew what time I was going to be in there so

Alice Cyr: He used to run the 18 Bridge, 215 feet and he'd get a new flagman and the approach, on the north [] approach the cat tracks hang over the edge. So he'd get a new flagman

Paul Cyr: Different one everyday, different guy. (He crossed himself)

Alice Cyr: So he would get to the approach and he'd stop beneath and check all his zippers and make sure and fuss around and make the sign of the cross and put it in high gear and

Paul Cyr: I'd put it in high gear and

Alice Cyr: Poor man

Paul Cyr: And it couldn't go any faster

Alice Cyr: I can't even imagine the terror I ...

Karen Brewster: []

Alice Cyr: I get dizzy just to stand on a chair and I can't even imagine what he did to those poor kids.

Paul Cyr: Some of them there wanted to get off the cat and I said Get on. And pretty soon they're back on again cause they couldn't keep up and I did know where they were, they're back there and I couldn't see and I might be backing up so your safest place was right there, so

Karen Brewster: What about summer work, what did you do as an operator in the summer?

Paul Cyr: Well they got the big ore contract and they had to fill in a couple bridges, they had to put in a 700 foot tunnel. We didn't do that they contracted that out, all rock all 700 feet they wanted to eliminate that one big bridge, the big steel they would be hauling a big load of ore and it would be down in there (shows it toppling over). Put the tunnel in and so they patched up the other one and just out of town lots.

Alice Cyr: That, in the summer time it was every bit as busy as in the winter because if you needed to straighten a curve, if you needed to put in this siding, if you needed to lengthen this siding that was your time to do those things.

Karen Brewster: That was all done with operators.

Alice Cyr: Right that was when he worked maintenance away.

Karen Brewster: Un-huh

Paul Cyr: I don't usually to talk about people [] I was going to be replaced and I knew I was going to be, he was a good operator but he was a good sauce drinker and everybody knew and they were afraid to work around him because somebody was going to get hurt and who's to blame, well he was but ...

Karen Brewster: We need to change tape and we only have a few more minutes I have another couple more questions so I want to change tapes so you're not in the middle of

Paul Cyr: Sure go ahead.

End of Disk 1 of 2

Disk 2 of 2

Alice Cyr: Ballast, heavier rail, see, all those all that is heavy duty work

Karen Brewster: Oh so all that is heavy duty equipment work

Alice Cyr: Right

Karen Brewster: And now then you said you worked until '88. The railroad closed down in what '82 or 83.

Alice Cyr: '82 October

Karen Brewster: And then what did you do when it closed?

Paul Cyr: (He points to his wife.)

Alice Cyr: The most terrible, the most woe-be-gone, boring job you can ever imagine. What did you do?

Paul Cyr: I know I heard it. I'm trying to think what did I do? []

Alice Cyr: The tank operator, over there at the tank farm, tank operator, dipping tanks

Paul Cyr: Oh that's right, god I hated that job, geez I was sitting there I had the radio on but you had to be careful. If that gauge goes down a little bit there's something wrong and where's it going to be. You got to notify the proper operators at the other end and what the temperature the oil was it and. Oh god I hated that job. It was paperwork, and paperwork, and ...

Karen Brewster: So then when did White Pass, You went back to work for White Pass?

Alice Cyr: The pipeline was owned by White Pass. It was put in by [] but White Pass owned it.

Paul Cyr: They knew I had just a short while before I was going to be 75 and I was going to retire

Alice Cyr: No sixty-five

Karen Brewster: Sixty-five

Paul Cyr: Huh?

Alice Cyr: sixty-five, but because he had so many years in with the railroad

Karen Brewster: They just kept you on

Alice Cyr: Right he needed, they needed to run twenty-four hours a day so they gave him a job []

Paul Cyr: I told the Boss man, I'm quitting ... guys come in and checks the people all over?

Karen Brewster: Inspector?

Paul Cyr: Inspector, I said I'm going to quit, He says how's that? I said I'll be of age, right? And he checked yah you're right the day after tomorrow, well day after tomorrow you'll be of age to quit. So that's what I done. They couldn't believe I pulled the pin but that's what I did.

Alice Cyr: If he had still been the heavy equipment operator they probably would still have him working (wink)

Karen Brewster: Once White Pass started back up for just tourist you didn't work for them, as equipment operator?

Paul Cyr: No I don't think so

Alice Cyr: Um, they started back in '88, they started back in '88, but you continued on with the pipeline. Why didn't you go back as heavy duty?

Paul Cyr: Seem to me, seem to me I went to Whitehorse and I drove a truck

Alice Cyr: Oh, the Railroad closed in October of '82 it reopened but just for the tourist season in '83 but you continued at the pumping station which you hated. I wonder why you didn't go back to the heavy duty which you loved.

Paul Cyr: I just came to the age of retirement and "puff"

Karen Brewster: I wonder if maybe, [] once they reopened maybe there just wasn't enough equipment operator to keep the tracks clear

Alice Cyr: That just might be and they didn't need to make any repairs, renewals, alterations or anything. I don't know I never thought about it but it had to be a good reason.

Paul Cyr: Now Karl \*\*\* he works out there Bridge Building department [] you didn't have to know anything, geez you could, I could go up and start anytime. I've got to tell you another story. The big Boss he lives in town and I see him pretty near every time we come down and ah, he says we're going, I was going to quit, yah I was going to quit and he says what are you going to do? And I said quitting ... what the heck I was going to tell you something ... break somebody in, well he broke me in but he didn't need to break me in because I knew how to start a diesel, I knew where the valves were and all that stuff and end of the story

Alice Cyr: Now Cora has got to put dinner on the table before five

Karen Brewster: you've got \*\*\*

Paul Cyr: Yah I have a daughter here in Skagway

Alice Cyr: We've got about five minutes. We've got a granddaughter and we need to eat by 4:30 so she can go back to work.

Karen Brewster: Okay [] Tagish

Alice Cyr: When Bush was reelected in 2004

Paul Cyr: She knows what we're saying

Karen Brewster: I should say why did you move to Tagish?

Paul Cyr: I wasn't voting because ...

Karen Brewster: you're Canadian

Paul Cyr: Yeah so it doesn't matter

Alice Cyr: We bought a place in Tagish when the road was finished. That was

Karen Brewster: So a summer cabin

Paul Cyr: Big log, it's a big house there are big logs like [] I'll tell you it's two stories high. It's got a garage and cabin that we stay in for a while

Alice Cyr: Yes we just had a little summer cabin

Paul Cyr: there are big logs like [] I'll tell you it's two stories high. It's got a garage and cabin that we stayed in for a while

Alice Cyr: So now we can live in it year round

Paul Cyr: She's got a big garden going now, and we've got all the equipment to do all the, and we've got friends there's a fence around it and they come over and they say god I'd like to have some of those carrots. The carrots are this big and cabbage and cauliflower and potatoes

Karen Brewster: Well it sounds like you guys []

Paul Cyr: Yah, I should be bald but I

**Notations:**

[] indicates gap in replay

\*\*\* indicates the recording was garbled